



BULGARIA



BULGARIA AND HASKOVO

Bulgaria is one of the oldest countries in Europe. During its centuries-long history it has gone through periods of rise and ordeals. The town of Haskovo reflects all the diverse history of Bulgaria because of its location on an important crossroad between the East and the West, connecting Europe and Asia. The oldest recorded settlements on the territory of the town and its environs date back to the New Stone Age (around the V-th millenium BC). The numerous pre-historic, Thracian, Roman, late antique and medieval monuments are solid evidence of the long history of the town.

The favourable geographic situation and conditions for existence contribute to the early and constant development of the town. During contemporary time in the years after the beginning of the new century for less than 10 years the city drastically changed its vision to the positive... All Haskovo citizens and especially the guests of the city noticed this. And there is no coincidence that we – the employees of the Tourist Information Center – often say that the best live advertisement, the best advertising agents of Haskovo are the people who have already visited it!

Welcome, dear friends!

THE VIRGIN MARY MONUMENT

The Highest in the world statue of the Holy Virgin Mary with the Infant was built to convey the respect, love and gratitude of the people to the Mother of God. The monument was inaugurated by a traditional water-sanctifying ritual by Archbishop Arseny in 2003. In 2005 it was included into the book of Guinness World Records, and since 2009 it was also entered into the List of the Hundred most popular tourist sites in Bulgaria.

The authors of the statue are Petyo Alexandrov, Nikola Stoyanov and team. It is made of polymer concrete and weighs 80 tons. The overall height of the monument is 32.8 meters, and its attractiveness is supplemented by The Nativity of the Virgin chapel, which was built inside the base of the statue. The Yamacha Hill on which the Statue stands offers a fascinating breathtaking view over the city.

The idea to build the Monument of Virgin Mary belonged to the Mayor of Haskovo Georgi Ivanov, and was embraced and supported with donations by the general public of Haskovo. The symbolism was quite intentional rather than randomly selected. The Mother of God has always been considered to be the Patroness of the city. During the millennial history of the city, the Nativity of Virgin Mary has always been revered as one of the most important holy-days, and by Decision of the Municipal Board the 8-th of September was proclaimed to be the Day of Haskovo.





THE ALEKSANDROVO TOMB

The tomb in the vicinity of the village of Aleksandrovo dates back to the IV century BC, and is one of the most prominent monuments of the ancient Thracian culture. It was discovered in 2000 by the famous archaeologist Georgi Kitov (1943 - 2008). Its impressive size ranks the tomb among the most monumental ones on the Bulgarian lands.

In 2009 the Thracian Art Museum of the Eastern Rhodopes opened its doors in the immediate proximity to the tomb. The people of Japan had donated nearly \$ 3 million for the construction of this Museum. The huge museum complex was inaugurated personally jointly by the Japanese crown prince's brother - Prince Akishino and the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Georgi Parvanov.

The 98 gold decorations and jewels (4500 - 4000 BC), discovered in the northern part of the Sakar Mountain are amongst the most memorable and impressive exhibits of the museum. Together with the gold ornaments from the Varna necropolis and the necklace discovered in the vicinity of the Hotitsa village, these gold works prove to be the most ancient processed gold ornaments in the world.

Since 2011 the Aleksandrovo tomb has become a part of the List of the Hundred National Tourist Sights in Bulgaria. There is current procedure going on for inclusion of the Aleksandrovo tomb into UNESCO list of world cultural heritage monuments.

THE UZUNDJOVO CHURCH

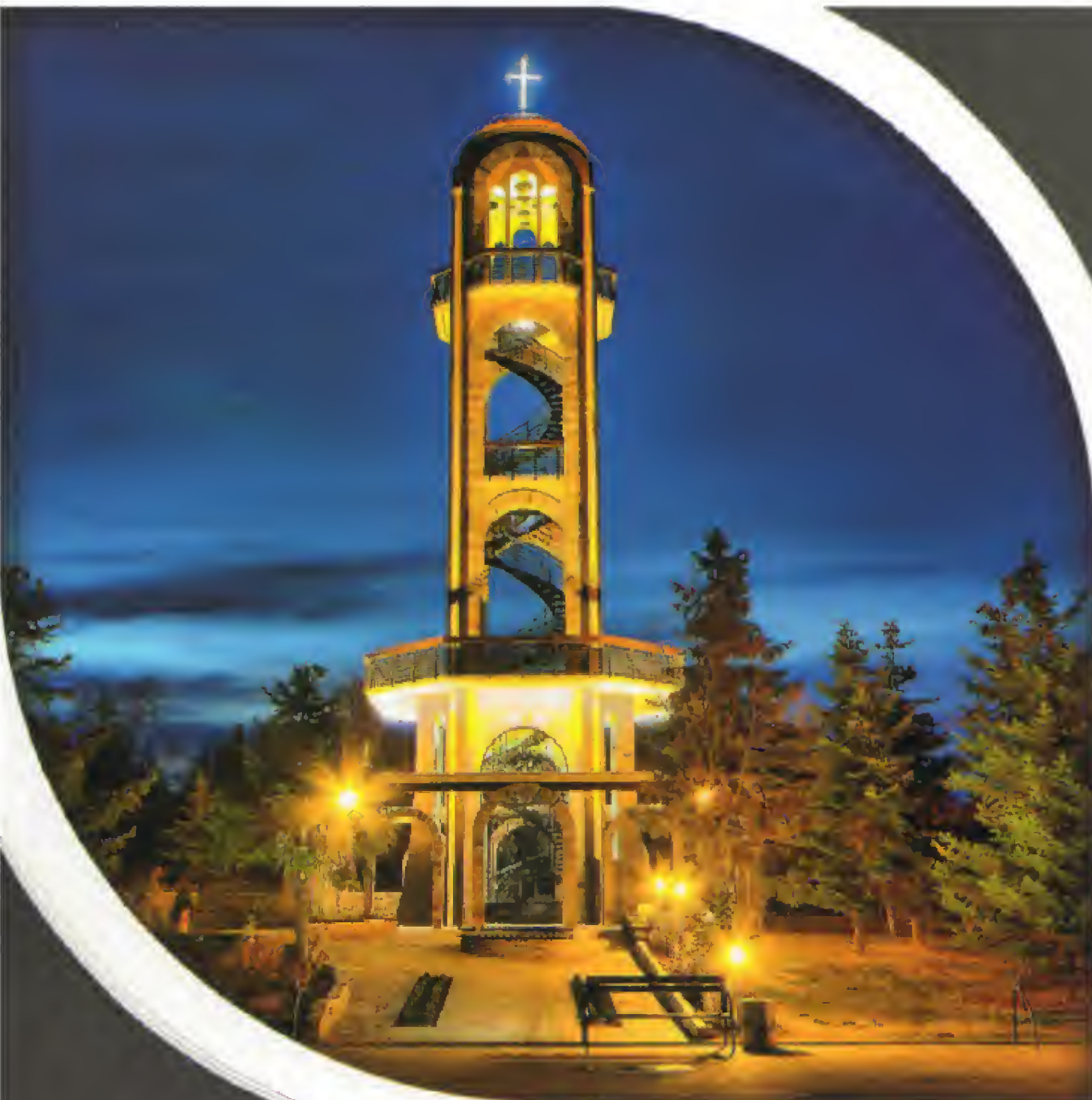
The Assumption is the largest rural church in Bulgaria.

It combines in an amazing way various elements of Christianity and Islam. Built initially as a Christian temple, in 1593 it was destroyed by the Ottoman Empire. A mosque was erected in its place - it was a part of a large estate of caravan seraglio, which according to the chronicles-writers resembled a fortress, whose central entrance is preserved until the present days. In the early 20th century the Turkish government returned the property back to Bulgaria and the reconstruction of the mosque into a church began at that time.

In 2007 the church was thoroughly reconstructed by the Haskovo Municipality. During the restoration works two ancient inscriptions in Arabic on religious-philosophical topics were discovered, but these latter inscriptions have not yet been accurately dated. All the icons and frescoes were restored. The Tryavna painter Master Darin Bozhkov carved a new iconostasis, which by its size ranks among the three biggest and most impressive ones in the country. The windows were decorated with fascinating stained glass works, depicting scenes from the life of the Mother of God.

In the last century the Assumption church in the village of Uzundjovo was proclaimed to be a cultural heritage monument.





THE BELL TOWER

In the summer of 2010, next to the Monument of Virgin Mary in the city of Haskovo, the edifice of the Belfry was built up. In years of spiritual poverty and skepticism, Haskovo residents have once again gave way to their - let me say - Renaissance creative drive! It took nearly half a million Bulgarian leva to build this enlightening Christian monument and, please note the fact that all the funding was collected in less than a year entirely from donations!

Rising to nearly thirty meters, the Belfry next to the Virgin Mary Monument in the city of Haskovo, is one of the highest on the Balkan Peninsula. On top of it there are eight bells of varying size and total weight little over one tonne.

The Belfry is open to visitors every day and due to the breathtaking views it offers from the top, it has been quickly beloved as a favorite destination of both residents and guest of the city of Haskovo.

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And now, every day at noontime, the bell tolling echoes throughout Haskovo, as if recalling the city's role as a gate of Christianity in Europe.

THE HIGHEST FLAGPOLE WITH THE NATIONAL FLAG IN BULGARIA

On July 20, 2012, Ilinden, with a solemn ceremony in Haskovo was inaugurated the highest flagpole with the national flag in Bulgaria! The idea of its rising, welcomed unanimously by the public in Haskovo, is of Haskovo mayor Georgi Ivanov.

The tricolor stands in Yamacha park on one of the highest heights in Haskovo. The flag dimensions are 6x9 meters, while the height of the metal flagpole is 30 meters. The newest symbol of the city is located near the Monument of Holy Virgin and the Belfry.

The rise of the highest flagpole with the national flag in Bulgaria is a kind of demonstration of Haskovo population high patriotic spirit preserved throughout centuries. From now on the Bulgarian tricolor flag shall be visible from any point of Haskovo town.





THE PASKALEV HOUSE

Undoubtedly the House of Chorbadij Pascal is a true architectural masterpiece. It was declared a cultural monument of national importance. Visitors of the house can see and trace the transition of the local people after the liberation from Turkish yoke from the traditional rural to the more urban and European lifestyles.

The Paskalev house is two-storey asymmetrical building with magnificent and very functional internal design. The semicircular bow window brings light, ease and sense of refinement, the beautifully carved ceilings, doors and cupboards bring comfort and warmth, while decorative niche with the French-style Alafrangi vaults complement the interior and give distinctive subtlety.

The ethnographic exposition exhibits real treasures illustrating the way of life of the Haskovo citizens of that time. The first floor acquaints the visitors with the everyday life of Haskovo family, while the second one impresses with its dignity of appearance and its spaciousness. The Paskalev House offers a myriad of peculiar feelings - a mixture of curiosity, aesthetic feast, comfort and security, surprise by the fact that the wooden couches in the living room live together with furniture from Vienna, the Russian Samovar teapot goes along with the European silver cutlery... And all this seems to be bound together by the traditional Haskovo carpets and rugs, with their amazing colorful stripes of various colors and composition, in which the women of Haskovo have interwoven their fine sense of beauty and aesthetics.

THE OLD HASKOVO CLOCK TOWER

The large scale construction of clock towers in enslaved Bulgaria in the Ottoman empire began by the end of 18th c. and the beginning of 19th c. During that period the Ottoman empire built such facilities in almost each Bulgarian town. The clock tower in Haskovo was constructed in the beginning of the 19th c. as symbol of the city and testimony of the economic boom of these years.

The Haskovo resident Kosta Arnaudov describes the tower as a thirty meters high construction, built of carved stone, with tin roof and sharp stiletto on the top. It was equipped with internal spiral staircase leading to a room with windows in the upper part. The clockwork was located in the middle of the tower and it was driven by two stone weights supported with thick ropes. A copper bell accounted hours. The tower served not only to measure time, but as well as watchtower for the town fire brigade. A scale model of the clock tower and the original clockwork are exhibited in the Regional History Museum, Haskovo.

For unknown reasons in 1913 the City council adopted a decision to demolish the clock tower. On its location in 1985 was erected the Monument 1000 years Haskovo.

On September 8, 2012 the mayor of Haskovo municipality Georgi Ivanov turned the first sod for the restoration of the city old clock tower.





OSMAN BABA TEKKE

Tekke (in Turkish - tekke) is a Muslim monastic community, monastery, usually a ritual complex of buildings where the center is occupied by a heptagonal building – called türbe, which serves as tomb / mausoleum (usually symbolic) of a saint.

The oldest Tekkes in Bulgaria, which are also the largest and the most famous, are four – Demir Baba Tekke near the village of Sveshtari, municipality of Isperih; Akyazulu Baba Tekke in the village of Obrochishte, municipality of Dobrich; Kademli Baba Tekke near the village of Sokol, municipality of Nova Zagor; and Osman Baba Tekke near the village of Tekketo, municipality of Haskovo.

But who is Osman Baba? The answer to this question is given by archaeologist Dimcho Aladzhev (1930-2010). Here is a translation of the tombstone: "BEAUTIFUL AREA! If the Almighty wishes it and fills the country with its mercy and delights, this will be a source for Osman Baba. Finding favour in the interior of Rumelia (countryside), he grew up and established himself here. He took the path of all worthy wise men. As a leader of Jemaah, he served in the infinite, like a sea, God's grace, he was a keeper of sorrow and grief (uncertain meaning due to deleted text). Coming from Hursan in the year of seven hundred and ninetieth (1389), he lent a hand to the rayah in Rumelia to pray for the praying folks. In the year of eight hundred and eighty third (1479) this Osman Baba left for the eternity."

Osman Baba Tekke has been declared a cultural monument since last century.

PERPERIKON

The Rock City is the most famous archaeological site in Bulgaria recently. According to the archaeological studies, the first traces of life at Perperikon date back to 6 thousand years ago during the Stone-Copper Age. During the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age the ancient city became a prominent ritual center. Even the ancient historian Herodotus wrote about the famous sanctuary and prophecy center of the Thracian god Dionysus-Zagreus, situated in the Eastern Rhodopes - carved into the rocks with a stone altar on which our predecessors poured wine and lit a fire. The local priestess was as famous as the unparalleled Pitia who served in the Temple of the Delphic Apollo. The Roman author Suetonius adds that it was in fact at Perperikon that Alexander the Great learnt he would become the ruler and master of the world.

Many cultures and religions have left their signs and traces on the Eastern Rhodopes and Perperikon. Despite the differences, they all worship one and the same day of the year - the day of the summer solstice.

The custodian of the millenary tradition today is the Perperikon Festival, which is held on the eve of June 22 every year, thus commemorating and guarding our path from the shrouded with mysterious secrets past to the enigmatic future ...





THRACIAN SANCTUARY

The Deaf Stones

The Deaf Stones rock sanctuary shrine is one of the largest Thracian cult monuments. It includes several large rock blocks with deep gorges cut in. At the foot of one of the blocks a rock tomb chamber is carved. A bed and a small niche are cut in the eastern part of the rock chamber. There are traces of a second unfinished tomb to the side. In the rock block to the east a staircase is carved which leads to the summit with a well-shaped pool. The remaining three rocky peaks are dotted with more than 200 religious cult rock niches.

The location of the sanctuary seems to have been selected very carefully – the nature around is extremely beautiful and awesome, and the site offers excellent views to all directions of the world. The ancient inhabitants of the Rhodopes perceived the looming up above the surrounding terrain, the rock formations as were sacred. For the Thracians the height of the rock symbolized the ritual act of the transition from the everyday life to the sacred. The one who rises by climbing up the stairs of the sanctuary leading to heaven ceased to be a man – reaching the top of the peak and touched by the first rays of the sun, the priest - clergyman transpired and dispersed into another, new and clean space...

The Orpheus Sanctuary

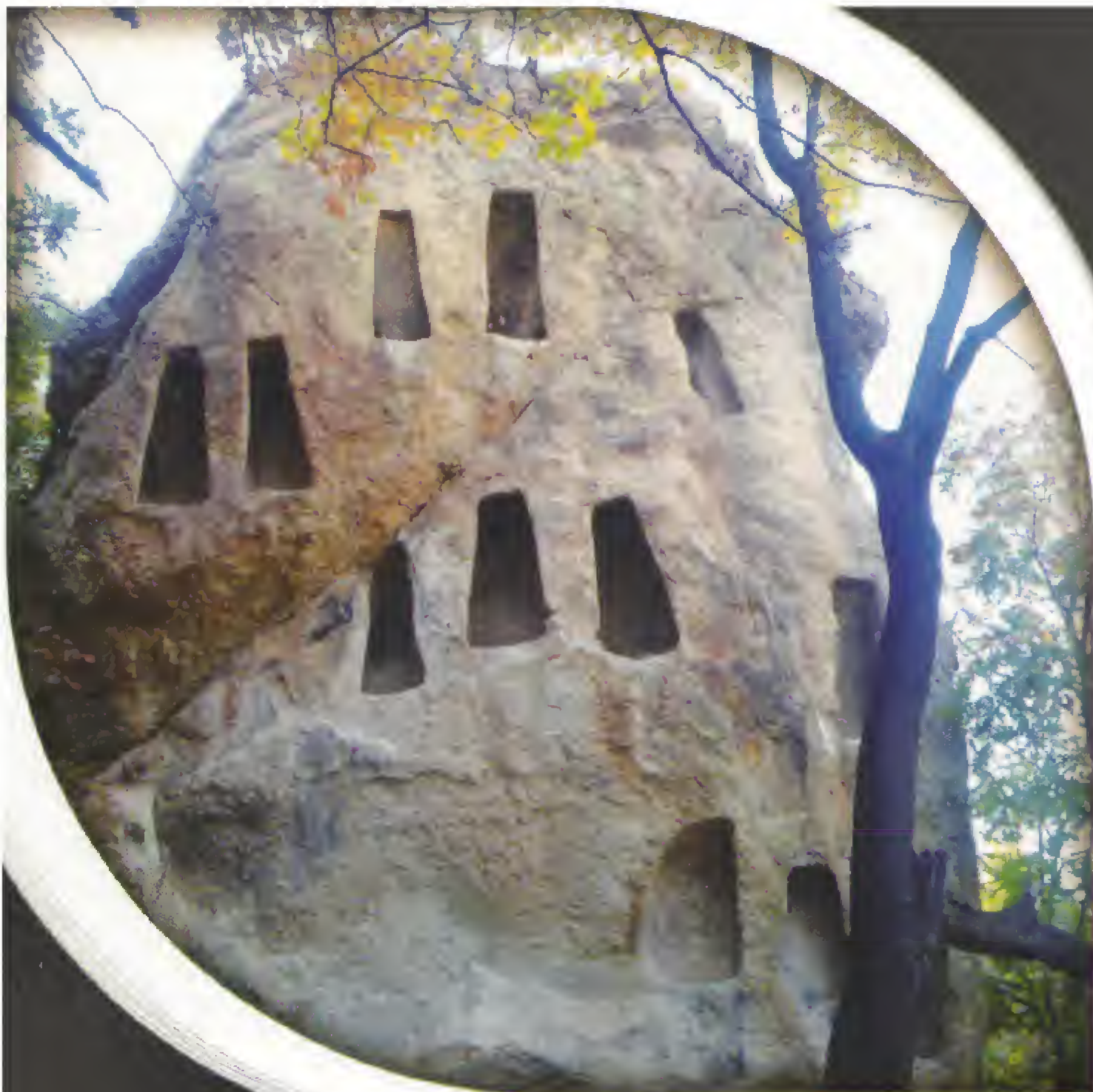
in the Vicinity of the Village of Tatul

There is no doubt that the oldest in Thrace "Heroon" - a sanctuary of deified ruler - is the one discovered in the vicinity of the village of Tatul. The most recent archaeological studies suggest that this is the sanctuary of Orpheus himself - the famous Thracian singer and hero, the legendary guardian of the Rhodopes.

The sanctuary complex is one of the most imposing megalithic monuments on the Bulgarian lands. It consists of an ancient pagan temple and a medieval fortress. The central and highest place is occupied by a tomb hewn in the rock, which is accessed through a ceremonial staircase. The rock tomb is the symbolic grave of Orpheus to ensure that he could act as an intermediary between the Heaven and the Earth, between the Gods and the humans.

During the excavations of 2004 - 2007, a circle of fireplaces was found at the Tatul site - which fireplaces seem to have served as the altars on which the sacrifices and offerings to the gods were performed. In the altar ashes the archaeologists have found hundreds of items related to the ancient cults, including a part of a golden mask similar to the masks discovered at the excavations of the royal tombs of Mycenae, some human clay idols, vessels for drinking holy wine, the top of a priest's sceptre, as well as multitude of bones from the sacrifice acts.





THE THRACIAN RELIGIOUS CULT SITE near the village of Angel Voivoda

The ancient shrine in the vicinity of the Angel Voivoda village occupies a special place among the many megalithic monuments around Haskovo. The complex is located on a rocky peak, known as the Hisar peak. At the foot of the peak lies a huge boulder, on which a full circle divided in four parts is carved, with a hole for attaching wooden or metal rods. The facility probably served as a sun-dial, or it might have been used as a tool for astronomical observations. On the summit of the peak the visitor can see the traces of a fortress wall. There are more than 50 religious cult niches carved in the rocks. In the highest part of the peak on one of the pinnacles, a stone tomb of trapezoidal shape is carved, which is accessible through five steps again carved in the rock. To the west of the tomb a second such pinnacle is found. The altar was most probably located there. Under the top of the peak a large sacrifice site of trapezoidal shape is carved. Some 50 meters to the northeast of the tomb a shallow oval basin is located. Under the top of the peak there is also a natural terrace, which was most probably used as a sanctuary.

THE DOLMEN in the Vicinity of Hlyabovo Village

The Dolmens (from Breton language, Dol – table, and man – a stone), are the first representatives of the monumental tomb architecture in the Bulgarian lands. The Dolmas are found mainly on the territory of Haskovo region in the mountains Strandzha, Sakar and Eastern Rhodopes. They are the foundations for the created later-on unique Thracian tombs, such as the one discovered in the vicinity of the village of Alexandro.

The dolmen in the vicinity of the village of Hlyabovo is the most impressive throughout Bulgaria. According to the most ancient materials used in building the dolman, and further discovered during the archeological research on the dolman, it dates back to the Early Iron Age (approximately 1050 to 500 BC).

Probably dolmens were erected for community members with relatively high social status. Unfortunately, concrete information about the exact names and positions of these people is still missing and they remain anonymous, irrespective of the monumental nature of the complex archeological tomb site.. There is one thing certain however – that the owners of such ever-lasting homes, which guarantee peaceful restful existence in their afterlife, had the authority of rulers of some kind.





THE ROCK CHURCH near the village of Mihalich

The Rock church, in the vicinity of the village of Mihalich is a cultural monument of national importance. It is the only one of its kind in Bulgaria with a unique tri-branched shape. The church was carved in the limestone block in the area Aypando about 1.5 kilometers from the village of Mihalich. A corridor with fourteen steps carved into the rock leads the believers down into the worshiper's niche. The entrance is 4 metres wide and 5 metres high. Three shallow semi-cylindrical shaped niches are cut in the rock directly above it. With these niches the the ancient masters tried to imitate the windows above the entrances of the city churches. Two similar, but smaller niches are to be found on the walls of the corridor. Three shapes called Concha establish separate some space with the form of a cross. A podium altar of stone blocks was built at the bottom of the eastern apse. Two triangular shaped recess niches were also engraved by the builders in the two side angles between the central and two lateral conchas. These two latter niches resemble columns or wall piers carrying the dome. The walls are carved in crosses.

With its unique architecture and impressive size, the rock church at the village of Mihalich is one of the most interesting Christian monuments in the Bulgarian lands.

THE SANCTUARY OF THE NYMPHS AND APHRODITE near the village of Kasnakovo

The sanctuary of the nymphs and Aphrodite is situated in a picturesque area near the village of Kasnakovo, just a few kilometers from Haskovo. It is the best preserved Thracian sanctuary in Bulgaria. The sanctuary was erected on the ruins of an ancient religious center, which emerged around the karsts mineral springs in the early Iron Age. The sanctuary represents a large complex of several buildings and a big amphitheater. According to the preserved inscription, it was built in the II century by the Thracian veteran from the Roman Army Titus Flavius and his faithful wife to honor the water nymphs and Aphrodite. The complex also included religious buildings and buildings for pilgrims. The three mineral springs impress with its beautiful architectural design, and their water is famous for their curative powers.

Every year a fair is held at the sacred place on the Ascension Day (Spasov den), 40 days after Easter. People bring and leave gifts at the springs and around them, light candles, and animal sacrifice is performed.

In 1968, the sanctuary of the nymphs and Aphrodite in the vicinity of the village of Kasnakovo was declared a cultural monument of national importance.





THE EASTERN RHODOPE MOUNTAIN

The Eastern Rhodope Mountain is the only part on the Balkan Peninsula with such a great abundance of monuments of the Thracian megalithic culture. It is called "The land of the rock people" – the first Thracians who have remained a "terra incognita" to archeologists for a long time. Thousands of ancient artifacts – hills, rock sanctuaries, dolmens, caves, strongholds, etc. – have been scattered all along one of the biggest and most picturesque rivers in this part of the mountain – the Arda River.

The Eastern Rhodopes are also abounding in natural phenomena. Here you can find numerous rock-shaped figures of bizarre outlook – pyramids, mushrooms, animals, humans, etc.

Flora and fauna in the Eastern Rhodopes are characterised by an extraordinary diversity of rare and protected tree species, plants, birds, amphibians and mammals. Here is the biggest in Bulgaria location of the so-called Orpheus' flower, also known as "Haberlea Rhodopensis", and the habitat of the largest vulture colony, including Griffon, Egyptian and Eurasian Black vultures.

In summary, it is notable that in the Eastern Rhodopes you can feel the full harmony between human and nature. Besides, another curious fact is that according to Indian meditation schools of philosophy, the Rhodope Mountain is one of the seven sacred mountains on Earth.

FISHING

MARITSA is the largest river on the Balkan Peninsula, here you can manage to catch the biggest fish of your life. The facts speak for themselves - there has been cat-fishes caught here weighing over 50 kg; **ARDA** river is the largest river in the Rhodopes. Still an extremely popular attraction for tourists and fishermen is the known under the name Sheytana rock gorge. It is a fantastic phenomenon which is unique in Europe; The **TUNDZHA** river is on the first place in terms of popularity in the country. It is a desired destination for hundreds of Bulgarian anglers. Legends are spread about the deep waters of the river and the aquatic creatures with trophy sizes inhabiting the river.

The emblematic of the Eastern Rhodopes **KARDZHALI** dam is among the biggest in Bulgaria. Each season has its charm, and the wonderful nature provides the appropriate conditions not only for rest and recreation, but also for aesthetic enjoyment; The **STUDEN KLADENETZ** dam (eng. Cold well) is the second largest dam in Bulgaria. Every single fisherman from the neighbourhood has come to try his luck here, because the diversity of fish species is very high; With its 36 km length the **IVAYLOVGRAD** dam is the longest dam in Bulgaria. This giant dam-lake attracts many lovers of nature, water sports and, of course - rod-loving fishermen; The **TRAKIETZ** Dam is extremely attractive and is a favorite of the Haskovo citizens since its construction until the present day. It has many places comfortable for fishing as well as suitable places for camping and camps under the stars.





SPA (*Sanos per aqua*) HASKOVO MINERAL BATHS

Bulgaria is one of the countries with the greatest abundance of mineral waters with specific healing effects in the world. The balneological-healing method has a number of advantages in comparison to the drug-healing one. It provides no secondary effects, no allergic or toxic processes and it doesn't harm the body organs. Due to the great concentration of minerals, micro and macro elements and chemical combination of the substances containing in the water, the excellent healing effect is reached.

Haskovo Mineral Baths are famous for being a balneological centre since the Age of Romans. The water is hyper thermal (57° C) and is unique for its mineral structure. Haskovo Mineral Baths are suitable for healing:

- Musculoskeletal system diseases - joints, periarthritis, bursitis, tendovaginitis, myalgia, myositis, lumbago, contractures condition after bone fractures suffered, soft tissue injuries;
- Peripheral nervous system diseases - chronic neuralgia, neuritis, plexitis, radiculitis, discopathy, vegetative neurosis;
- Gynaecological diseases - chronic salpingo-oophoritis (adnexitis) and periadnexitis, chronic metritis, endo-, peri- and parametritis, agensis;
- Concomitant Disease - mild hypertension and arteriopathy, obesity;
- Help to strengthen the body.

THE THRACIAN WINE

In ancient times the Thracian biblin-type of sweet wine was very famous. Later on the vine from which it was produced got transferred to Italy and Syracuse. "So it happened that the sweet wine called "polis-type" by the Sicilians would have been the same biblin-type of wine," wrote the historian Athenaeum. Further Homer described how the Thracian priest Maro gave Odysseus "... twelve amphorae full of sweet, undiluted wine, a divine drink ... whenever they wanted to drink from that red wine, sweet as honey, he filled a glass of it, mixing it with twenty times as much water and a pleasant fragrance of divine odour spread from the wine vessel. It was very difficult to withstand it..." This statement of the wine dilution may have been exaggerated. In ancient Greece and Rome they usually added three times as much water as wine to dilute it. The Thracian custom to drink wine undiluted and at a breath was considered "barbarian". Here we should open brackets in order to clarify that the ancient wines were very thick and strong. The effect of heavy drinking with Thracian wine was similar to that of today's wines. Pliny the Younger said that "after drinking this wine the head hurts for six hours (until noon) on the next day".

Oh, yes... In summary, we can say that the ancient tradition is alive – there are dozens of wineries in the region of Haskovo producing wine that can truly enchant you.

In vino veritas!





DRAMATIC AND PUPPETS THEATRE „IVAN DIMOV”

The dramatic and puppets theatre Ivan Dimov deserves its reputation as one of the most beautiful and modern theatres in Bulgaria. The temple of Melpomena in Haskovo is built back in 1926 and then completely renovated and refreshed in 2004 with funds from the municipality. It has played central role in the city's cultural life during the years of its act.

The dramatic and puppets theatre Ivan Dimov – Haskovo offers to its visitors shows in two halls: one big for dramatic performances with 260 seats and one small for puppet presentations with 110. The theatre is provided with easy access points for disabled. It has rich warehouse with costumes, workshop for artist-performer, carpentry workshop, hardware workshop, remarkable wardrobe and props.

Both lobbies of the dramatic and puppets theatre Ivan Dimov in Haskovo are permanent art galleries. For those visitors who do not have sitters there is a 'Fairy tale room', space to care for their children during the performances. Before the beginning of each act, a professional pianists plays to create the specific theatre atmosphere.

Since June 2006, thanks to its collaboration with municipality Haskovo, the theatre is place of a Theatrical Festival, which spreads the theatric art all around town for a few days each year.

CULTURAL AND SPORTS CENTER

Inhabited for more than 7000 years, the town of Haskovo has preserved its unique spirit. The rich cultural and sports life of the town is facilitated by the open stage of the Cultural and Sports Center "Spartak". This unique open-air complex, arranged in tiers, seats 3500 people and has a covered stage space of 300 sq.m., which provides opportunities to satisfy the choices of the audience for different entertaining and sports events. In 2006 an ice-rink with an area of 600 sq.m. was constructed in front of the stage of the Cultural and Sports Center attracts a lot of visitors.

The modern lighting, the greenery, the spacious stage with contemporary design, new installation, dressing rooms and hotel part completely changed the outlook of the Spartak cultural and sports complex.

In 2006 an ice rink with an area of 600 square meters was built in front of the stage of the complex – and is still the only one in the Haskovo region. It quickly became the favorite place for entertainment and sport for all little and old, and even older girls and boys.





THE INTERNATIONAL MUSICAL DAYS

Professor Nedyalka Simeonova

"Haskovo! The capital of the sunbathed south veiled in the revolutionary and heroic glory of ancestors ... illuminated by purple dreams – worships in obedience the halo of earthly stars, who grew to become prophetic giants in the fields of struggle, labour, science and popular culture ... !

Eternal will be the pride of the working people in this region, because Haskovo was her birthplace and childhood home, it was here where she heard the songs of nightingales and crickets and where with her child's hand she touched her first violin – the world-renowned violinist, Professor Nedyalka Simeonova.

And not only folks of Haskovo!

Descendants from across the country and abroad have bowed peaceful heads in front of the creative genius of the great Bulgarian violinist. The best orchestral and chamber bands and the most prominent masters of global violin schools come here to demonstrate their artistic skills."

The above was part of the official address on the occasion of the start of the Sixth Musical Days named after Professor Nedyalka Simeonova. The emotional intensity and the beauty of expression have made us re-use this address even today, decades after the beginning in 1971.

THE NATIONAL COMPETITION for Debut Literature "Southern Spring"

The Southern Spring National Competition for Debut Literature is held during the month of April every year. The young poets, writers and literary critics of Bulgaria gather in the town of Haskovo, to present their debut works. For the contest, first books and cinema scripts are accepted from authors below 40 years of age in the following genres: poetry (verse/poetry, poems), fiction (short stories, novelettes, novels), literary criticism and literary history, film script. The young artists share ideas, meet with prominent Bulgarian writers, become familiar with the history and culture of the town of Haskovo. Each winner receives a bronze statuette of the winged Pegasus - which is the symbol of the Southern Spring national competition for debut literature. The idea behind this competition belongs to the great artist Ognian Funev. The statuette is made by the sculptor Stephen Shishkov. The Municipality of Haskovo also presents an award for overall contribution and achievements in the field of literature and arts in the name of the first Bulgarian publisher Alexander Paskalev, who was born in the town of Haskovo. Within the framework of the Southern Spring National Competition for Debut literature held in Haskovo every April, a book sale bazaar is also organized, where all the well-known Bulgarian publishers participate.





NATIONAL GATHERING OF FOLK ARTS "The Lovely Thrace Sings and Dances"

The month of May is the focus of the cultural celebrations of the city. The Lovely Thrace Sings and Dances National Festival of Folk Art brings festive mood and joy to the hearts of patriotic Bulgarians for more than 40 years now.. The organizers of the event are the Haskovo Municipality and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The Fair aims to promote the most authentic Bulgarian and also Thracian folklore. In the Lovely Thrace Sings and Dances Fair some 200 folk groups and individual performers from Bulgaria and abroad participate every year now. The fair is not a true competition, however special awards are provided to the participants who presented new spring songs and dances. The numerous audiences each year follow with close interest these magnificent manifestations of the folk wisdom and subtle dances - all of which enchant and capture the audience with their authentic character and wide diversity. It is only so natural and logical to once again discover the deep roots of the rich Bulgarian soul and mentality - especially there, in the open air under the shade of the trees and on the sunlit meadows of the Kenana forest park, under the rhythmical sounds of the bagpipes and wooden flute, accompanied by the rhythm of drums and the chorus' songs to find the deep roots of the rich Bulgarian mentality.

NATIONAL CONTEST AND FESTIVAL „With The Songs Of Ari"

The Haskovo-born Asparuh Leshnikov – Ari (1897-1978) is the most successful Bulgarian on the world music scene. Older generations remember Ari as singer of old city hits, some have even heard that he was famous Germany during the thirties of the past century as the first tenor of the hugely popular back then group 'Comediant Harmonists', but very few are those who know that this group popularity at its time was comparable with that of the Beatles in the sixties and was invited to tours around the world, while the tenor Asparuh Leshnikov was called 'King of the high Fa'... Even less known is the enormous contribution of the vocal sextet 'Comediant Harmonists' in jazz and popular music...

The national festival „With the songs of Ari" in Haskovo is dedicated to Asparuh Leshnikov – Ari and is an important event of the city's cultural calendar. It is held each year in the beginning of June. The cast is of unprofessional performers of old city hits from all around Bulgaria with the only condition to sing songs of the unforgettable son of Haskovo Ari Leshnikov.

The national festival „With the songs of Ari" is a contest in its nature and is classified in categories – sole performers, duets, trios, quartets and groups. A competent jury from the Plovdiv Music Academy for music and dance arts assesses the talent of all performers. The festival culmination is the gala concert of the winners.





THE HASKOVO JAZZ FESTIVAL

The first edition of HASKOVO JAZZ took place at the end of September 1997. Over the years the forum has established itself as one of the prestigious national jazz scenes with international participation of established musicians from all over the world, for example: UK - Scott Stroman quintet, Jez Franks, Tori Freestone; Poland - Karol Szymanowski, Renata Banacka, Jaskulke 3yo, Kasia Stankowska, Jan Smoczynski Trio; the Czech Republic - Ondrej Kabrna, Petr Volny, Irji Vshetecka, Milan Svoboda Quartet, Martina Fisherova and Seven Days; France - Jonathan Bratoeff; Turkey - Pera Guzel Sanatlar, Doktor Melih Guzel; Denmark - Tonika saxophone quintet; USA - Chris Tofield blues band; Hungary - Tuzko Csaba, Kristof Bacso, Kornel Horvath Ethnosynteze; Austria - Martin Reiter, Mondautos, Pull my Daisy, Karlheinz Miklin Trio, Nouvelle Cuisine Big band, We three, Franz Hautzinger Speakers Corner, Michaela Rabitsch, Robert Pawlik. Prominent Bulgarian names like Kamelia Todorova, Milcho Leviev, Peter Salchev, Theodosius Spasov, Yildiz Ibrahimova, Beloslava, Vasil Petrov, White, Green and Red, Vicky Almazidu, Hristo Yotsov, Bulgari, Dimitar Rupchev, Hilda Kazasyan Dune Dance Company, Maya Novoselska, Big Band Plovdiv, Elena Koleva, OM Group, Edmond Demirdjian, Infinity, Swing Dixie Gabrovo Raycho Ivanov, Lot Lorient and many others have also presented their art at the stage of HASKOVO JAZZ.

HASKOVO THEATRE FESTIVAL

The youngest until now public holiday was born in June 2006 – the Theatre festival of the town of Haskovo. Thanks to the joint efforts of the Ivan Dimov Drama and Puppet Theater, and of the Municipality of Haskovo, for several days the theatre art dominates everywhere throughout the city - it is at the stage, in the Room of the Tales, in the streets, in the park, in the night club. The main objective of the theater days in the town of Haskovo is twofold - to present the main trends in the Bulgarian and international stage practice, and to create space for inter-cultural dialogue, for artistic exchange and market. The Festival program was developed as a mosaic of different modules. The expanded format for presentation of theatre activities helped many Bulgarian actors to meet with an unlimited number of Haskovo, audience fans, whereas the round table, which traditionally concludes and closes the Theater days, provoking the thinking of specialists and artists. Year after year Theatre Festival in Haskovo gradually and naturally fits into the big family of European festivals and declares its presence on the theater map of the continent.





UCADEMY KAUNI

The first issue of newspaper Kauni was published in April 1999. At the same time was founded the Ucademy Kauni.

Members of the Ucademy are all persons mentioned in the newspaper first issue. A year later was inaugurated the prestigious Kauni prize with statuette shaped by the sculptor Gospodin Tenev. The first laureate of the statuette is the Haskovo writer Dr. Petar Marev. Other award winners are prof. Vesa Kyuvlieva (who published for the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences the first vocabulary of Haskovo city dialect), Bojidar Dimitrov, the writer Dimitar Inkyov, the clown Kenny (Ivomir Ignatov), or the actor Diyan Machev.

The activity of Ucademy Kauni consists in holding one festival of wit clubs from around the country, two festivals of clowns and two literary competitions with international participation. In the literary competition take part the best known Bulgarian humor writers, but as well young talents seeking recognition. In cooperation with the photographers from the city are held several exhibitions in Haskovo, Dimitrovgrad, and Smolyan. The main purpose of the newspaper and the Ucademy is to promote Haskovo wit and dialect while being a stage for expression of local authors and artists. Since year 2000 the publication of newspaper Kauni is financed and supported by the municipality of Haskovo and numerous sponsors.

P.S. „Kauni“ in Haskovo's dialect means melon :)

THE INTERNATIONAL OPEN FESTIVAL „ORIENTAL MAGIC“

In 2006 Milena Nalbantova, as chief promoter, with the kind host of the national exemplary library Zarya-1958, Haskovo, initiated the open festival for belly dances, ethno, hip-hop, latino and contemporary dances – Oriental magic.

Over the years the festival has established itself as an international forum of dance arts where home and foreign performers and artists demonstrate their skills and exchange experience.

During the festival all teams may perform in any or all dancing styles, as well as to participate in a specific category – solo performance, duets, small groups, formations, productions... Age groups range as follow: children up to 8 and from 9 to 11 years, teenagers from 12 to 15 and dancers over 16 years. The style belly dances provides for a competitive category for professional solo performers.

In the festival jury participated such names as Igor del Mestre from the International Dance Organization – IDO; Boryana Sechanova, chief art director and choreographer of Arabesk ballet; prof. Petar Petrov, from the Southwestern University in Blagoevgrad... In 2012 for the first time was introduced the competitive category Relax Show, in which any parent, amateur, choreographer or simply addicted to dancing may perform without any age or dance style limits.

The open festival Oriental magic is held with the support of Haskovo municipality.





THE RETRO PARADE AND RETRO RACING Haskovo

The Retro Club of Haskovo has adopted the mission and goal to seek, acquire, restore, preserve, use and promote old vehicles, which are of interest and may shed further light on the history of the cars - classic cars, including "Hot Rot" (with improved design and some changes), to educate people about the development the automobile industry, to facilitate for improving the technical skills and knowledge, to establish contacts with other clubs in the country and abroad, and to assist the owners of old vintage cars. Annually the club holds two events on national scale – the Retro Parade, which is part of the festive program to celebrate the Days of Haskovo in September, and the Retro Racing which takes place in April at the karting racing track in the city. The Retro Club of Haskovo is a member of Bulgarian Automobile Club - Retro and the International Federation for antique cars (FIVA), which was founded in 1966 and is the only organization for older vehicles, recognized by UNESCO.

The members of Retro Car Club - Haskovo often take part with their vehicles in various events at home and abroad, where their contribution is duly appreciated and they often win prizes.

THE MOTOR GATHERING IN HASKOVO

The Hyenas Moto Club - Haskovo was officially established in 1999. The objective of the organization is to support and defend the interests of all the people, who are united by their love for the motorcycles and the free way of life - and friendship, fun and mutual assistance underlie its founding principles. Subsequently the Hyenas Moto club became a member of the Bulgarian Motorcycle Association / BMA/ - organization where clubs from all over and across the whole country of Bulgaria participate.

Since 2004, the Hyenas Moto club organizes one of the largest scale national Moto fairs in Bulgaria. It is held every year at the end of May, amidst the greenery of the emblematic for the city of Haskovo Yamacha Park. Many bikes, a lot of music, much beer, and many very pretty girls - great prizes and a lot of good mood... This is probably the shortest way to describe the Moto gathering in the town of Haskovo. The event brings together nearly 5000 guests - riders, bikers from all over Bulgaria and abroad, motor clubs, organizations and, last but not least - lovers of "...beer, sex and rock&roll..."





HASKOVO MOTOR SPEEDWAY

The grand opening of Haskovo's new speedway was on 28th of August 2011. The length of the track is 1710 meters and the width is 12-15 meters. The layout meets the requirements of the European Motorcycle Union and the International Motorcycle Federation. All types of motorcycles (MX ATV, MX1, MX2, MX65, MX3, MX85) are allowed to race on the track.

After the grand opening of the new speedway the Second round of the National Championship of Motocross is held. The town of Haskovo has traditions in this sport and it has been 12 times a National Champion of Motoball. The citizens and the guests of the city attended the National Championship of Motocross for the last time in 1981.

The idea for the renewal of the speedway belongs to Mr. Georgi Ivanov, the Mayer of Haskovo Municipality and the enthusiasts from The Hyenas Motorcycle Club – Haskovo.

THE HASKOVO KARTING TRACK

The Karting track in the town of Haskovo is one of the largest and best equipped in the Balkans. Numerous national and international championships are held there every year. The dimensions of the karting complex are impressive, and the route is longer than 1000 meters and 8.5 meters wide. The Karting track in Haskovo has 700 seats available, a separate repairs area and parking spaces. The perfectly lighted route gives the opportunity to hold driving races also after sunset. For the fans of the karting sport, the Haskovo Karting track offers karts of 270 cc, 9 hp and modern software to record the time and the average speed AMV.

Besides the professional and amateur competitions included in the annual calendar of the complex, the karting track can also host corporate and inter-company competitions or some of the so-called "team building" events. For several years now in April the karting track has hosted the annual Retro-Racing Haskovo event, organized by the Retro Club - Haskovo.

A nice addition to the karting complex are the hotel premises and the restaurant offering rich menu and cozy atmosphere and overlooking the runway.





THE TENNIS COMPLEX

The city of Haskovo offers modern facilities for tennis, squash and badminton among the tranquillity and fresh air of the Kenana forest park. The guests of the city have at their disposal seven red tennis courts and two indoor tennis courts with multifunctional floors of the Green Set type. Professional coaches provide and assistance to tennis fans of all ages who wish to experience the pleasure of this sport, and the sports activities are held in individual and group formats. The courts are well-lit and allow for playing at night-time.

The Haskovo tennis complex is designed with a view to provide for organizing international competitions and has permanent spectator seats. Every year the town tennis complex hosts many corporate events, seminars and international tennis tournaments. The conditions offered at the Haskovo tennis complex allow for practicing of other sports also - football, basketball, handball, volleyball and others. The complex includes a restaurant offering traditional Bulgarian cuisine.

DIANA SHOOTING COMPLEX

Haskovo - based Diana Shooting Complex offers unique opportunities inaccessible elsewhere in Bulgaria.

The complex offers all kinds of weapons and instruction by experienced instructors. The shooting ground spreads on an area of 30 dka and has a Benchrest shooting band and two polos to sport the Olympic disciplines of Skeet-Trap, Single Trap, Double Arm Trap, Multitrap, Compak Sporting Claymate. There are also shooting bands for short firearm and opportunities for rifle shooting at a moving target at distances of 50, 75, 100, 150 and 200 meters. It is particularly useful for hunters willing to practice the "Running Boar" exercise at the short firearm shooting band. There are shooting positions equipped with metal shooting benches to fire at a distance of 100, 135 and 200 meters.

Guest of Diana Shooting Complex - Haskovo can buy hunting and sporting weapons, ammunition, accessories and clothing at the two large stores located in the shopping area. Particularly for beginners training courses are organized under the guidance of experienced shooters. Other advantages of Haskovo's Diana Shooting Complex are the spacious parking lot and the cozy café...





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